

A photograph of three antique violins leaning against a light-colored wall. The violin in the foreground is a dark reddish-brown color with a dark green neck and a dark tailpiece. It has a worn, aged appearance with some white scuffing on the body. Behind it, two other violins are visible, one with a lighter wood finish and another with a darker, more weathered finish. The violins are positioned diagonally across the frame. The text "The Paean of Mephistopheles" is overlaid on the left side of the image, and "Andreas Gripp" is overlaid on the right side.

The Paean of
Mephistopheles

Andreas
Gripp

The Paean of Mephistopheles

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The Paeon of Mephistopheles

and other poems

Andreas Gripp

Beliveau Books

CANADA

The Paean of Mephistopheles

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Author's Note

The Paeon of Mephistopheles is a new, 13-poem suite of sorts to whatever phantom devil may exist within our lives. Perhaps one of our own making or one that's been thrust upon us by the world. The title poem itself is something of an epic that pays a transitory homage to Mephistopheles, the demon of Faustian folklore. Multiple meanings unravel in every line. Take some extra time to find your own.

—Andreas Gripp, 2025

So long, and thanks for all the fish

—Douglas Adams



Catharsis

On the day
I pass away,
I'll say I'm *out*
for a leisurely
swim.

I'll be decked
in a scuba
suit, for a corpse
that's been in the
water
is unsightly
to say the least.

What's that?
I can barely
do the length
of Ramada's
pool?
Well that's the
whole point,
can't you see?

I will say
I'm off to
Sandusky,
in the warmth
of August
rays. To do it
in the winter
is to suffer
more than once.

Hypothermia

will kill you much
too cruelly.
It's bad enough
to drown,
to sink to Erie's
depth,

feigning I've always
wanted to spy
some sunken ship-
wreck—ghostly
and forlorn—

I merely *forgot*
my oxygen
tank, at the cabana
that doesn't exist,

nor will I,
leaving just this
sotted poem
which I'll say
was a jocular stunt,
in that eerie,
airless moment
with too much *Malbec*
in my swig,

when your mouth
and nose are clogged
with sudden promise,
a vow to *never*
feel anything again,

that in the
time your favourite
song is done,

there's nothing but
numbing cold,
drifting in the vacant
deep

like an orb
that's gone astray,
left the comfort
of its revolving

just to *taste*
the abiding void—
in a soundless,
inland sea—

that's *wearied*
at last
from keeping me
afloat,

all these many, damnable
years I said I loved

the setting sun
upon your shoulders,
how it sank
below the waves

only to do it
all again
some stray tomorrow,

when what we say is
love
are mere magnetic
pulls
from a wretched moon.

Music

A million candles burning
for the love that never came
You want it darker
We kill the flame

—Leonard Cohen

Light is most
magnificent
when it's dark—
and I don't mean just
any kind of murk,
but when you can't
even see your fingers
before your eyes,
how they wiggle,
flipping the bird
to the stars
that wouldn't show,
to your bill
that wasn't paid,
to the sun
that takes too long
to reappear;

every step a shuffle,
the scrape of
shoe-on-floor,
Karloff's Mummy
dragging his bandaged
leg.

Your candle
in the morning
doesn't mean a
bloody thing.
And your verses
on the *diadem*
of trees? Beauty
is ever-useless
when the young
are out at play

and the verdancy
of summer's
just a case of
green-on-green.
It's their death-gasp
strive to glory,

the crunch of
varied colour
beneath your toes,
that make *autumn*
worth the chill
and shortened days.

No. Tell me the tale
of the man
who lost his hands,
blown off in a *blast*
in Mariupol,

how he used his
teeth to pry
his wedding ring,
from the severed
appendage *jutting*
from debris;

add a mistle
thrush he hears,

with what's left of
his shredded ears.

Make it toll
so pretty
as he swallows,
choking on his love
amid the rumbles,
the flap of falling
feathers.

Quickly now.
An adagio
sounds its best
in broken night.

Why No One Ever Asks Me for a Blurb

I despise the word

blurb.

Its approximation

to *burp.*

Its truncated

BS

on the back,

of that book

you feigned was

great, essential,

a 21st-century

masterpiece,

not the piece

of shit it really was.

I haven't got the

gumption

to tell it straight,

shooting at the centre

of the target,

felling the aspiring

poet in their hearth,

their flame
snuffed out at last,
never again
to inflict us
with their clumsy
prosody,
their incessant
démodé,
their farcing
the *quotidian*.

I confess
to my own
hypocrisy:

the blurbist's
constant usurping
of the stage,
the tossing of the
words in salad
bowls, without the *sting*
of vinaigrette,

the *look-at-me*
you fools
I'm surely
tempted to convey—
my praise
more poetic
than the *poetaster-*
disaster
within, embedded
like a landmine
between the covers.

So, my fellow bard,
ask me not
to laud your golden
verse, claim it's
even better
than your last,
worth *twice*
the price
of purchase,

say your rhyme of
“June” with “spoon”
is so clearly *innovative*—
in an *ironic*
sense, of course,
knowing the slurp
of every plaudit

cannot be ingested
with a fork,
a knife deliberately
dulled
on either side,
a utensil
in a month
that’s not the sixth—

open to the grifting
of my guile,
my wanton flattery.

Dominoes, or Another Rainy Day in London Town

A tickle in your throat
precedes a cough.
The microbes in your
mist, buoyed
like the beat

from a brazen
hummingbird—
its wings about
the nectar, much too fast
to spot. Your germs
latch on to others, who
pass through their
translucence.
What's aphonic

is the proverbial
pachyderm. The
floor has collapsed
from its presence,
while no one said
a word.

The Halls
are left intact. Their minty
mentholyp tus—pastilles of
broken vows. Even Ricola's
more effective
when you're at
the *symphony*,
the curse of front-row-
centre. You should have
downed the Buckley's
while you could. Like
brandy and a biting
stick. The surgeons
always knew
what they were doing.

Watch the conductor
stress the alphorn
not the flautist. The
man from Bern
whose hotfoot is
ablaze. He flew to
Mogadishu
just to walk upon
the coals.

Said he's never even
sniffled after that.

You've spiked my
gin with lemon. Said
citrus is the reason
for your smile. Even
Kool-Aid packs a
punch—its overkill
of C, that no one
suffers from scurvy
anymore. And lo, peg-
leg's rum is laced
with natural orange.

Careful, be. You know
what they say
about too *much*
of a pretty good thing.
Take the Taoists
at their word. Balance
goes beyond
the yin and yang.

And we've never
heard them *clear*
their scratchy throats.
That's why
there's always one
of them on bassoon. Look again.

A tickle in your throat
precedes a cough.
And there are days
in which it's better
not to know.
Who still says that
ignorance is idyllic?
I bet their sneeze is
muted
by the rumble of Ravel.
Bolero's over-
rated anyhow.

There is nothing
left to say
that doesn't baffle.

My N95's
in the cupboard,
beneath the sticky
Billy Bee. Silence
has never been
so golden-sweet.

The Paean of Mephistopheles

It began when the sun
had split the clouds
like Moses at the sea with an almond staff.
I could see none of it,
this cerement of darkness.
What we call *blindness*
is but the supplement of sound.

Listen to the crow and its mating call.
You believe the world has more than enough.
I plead they're misunderstood.
They sing that death
is nowhere near as bad as life.
And what is *better*
lasts a whole lot longer.

Play it Sam. Not in acquiescence
to jaded Rick, but that *Casablanca* speaks of
sacrifice. It's a rock-throw from Tangier.
Choose Ginsberg over Burroughs. Kerouac's
out of the question. Capote's gloried *typist*.
Two syllables and one *word*. Drank himself
to the grave because of it.

The constellations are entirely subjective.
You see a bear, I an elephant. And where
are all the offspring?
How can something at the speed of *light*
look so locked in a rigid stance?
Or is it *we* who are frozen?

The day you showed me your
story, I asked to read it in braille.
You replied my eyesight's
not that bad and the cost
would be prohibitive.
What are glasses anyway,
but an attempt to wipe the blur
from what should never be glimpsed at, clear?
My optometrist speaks in Latin
between the slides. It's pointless to me
although every disease is romance
when she does it.

The view over Wittenberg is grisly.
My wings are ragged and lacking
the aesthetic of down.

All who fix their gaze on me
will surely shun and shame. I only fly to flee.

Brother Dominic, why are the monks who
bake your bread so very half-assed bald?
It's all or simply nothing.
Fuck that Friar Tuck
and his miserable fashion sense.
None have touched a woman
and they hide all day in their hoods.
Your tunic was torn in Tunis.
You abandoned the faith
but pretend to this very hour.
While the others
received the Host, you chewed on m&m's.
Beware the *cavities* of your karma.

Do you also speak from Sinai?
Is your backyard hedge
afame? And what will you feed us in *lieu*
of His pallid manna?
Excuse me while I go and polish
the *hooves* of my golden calf.

They also churn to cheese, the milk.
If you serve with Sauvignon, I'll eat
like Jean Valjean. He knows what it is to be
hunted, sin's letter upon his breast
like a Hawthorne heroine. What is the
name of your lurking, phantom Javert?

As we forgive those
who trespass against us
is breaking the 9th commandment.
We do nothing
of the kind, lie to the Father's face.
Everything that's cloaked will be revealed.
Even space is filled with space.
I'll show you the microscopic
and then we'll settle our flimsy bet.
Empty is a human construct—
but don't expect *another* larva-change.
The butterfly's envied by moths
which refuse to swallow the light.
So far and yet so close.

See Him on the beach
as He instructs where to cast your net.
Mercy was never shown to a single fish.
When I said *I'm vegetarian*,
I continued to consume.
It's funny how far that five
and seven will take you.
Watch five-*thousand*
spit out the bones. *Jesus!* is not a curse
but a gasp from the given-up.

Everything I ingest
is long-since dead.
And not just the flesh of my shoes,
but the shrimp on my plate
when I'm cheating.
Watch *The Maltese Falcon*
and then tell me who's alive.
Play Prince and scorching Jimi—
a little Lennon too.
Imagine there's a Heaven.
That Norma Jean comes back at every
itching interval. Miles birthed the cool,
was parsecs ahead of the crowd.

Tell me that the wind
refuses to carry every note.
If Gabriel summons I AM,
why not the trumpets of Greenwich?

The Word was in the Beginning.
But then the fossils deemed it bull.
Why is Sophocles ignored, Plato not gilded in
gold? His dialogue, that is.
I called King Lear comedic
in a pretzel-logic way.
Three daughters worked out fine
for Carol Brady. Both Sherwood
Schwartz and Shakespeare were well ahead
of their time. The irony of the Island
was they were home but didn't know it.
Gilligan had his Ginger
and all the coconuts they could eat.
But Mary Ann was really the catch.

Let's talk fossils, shall we?
Scales had turned to feathers
before the dinosaurs' days were done.

See it for yourself,
just *below* the iridium line.
Damn that bloody meteor!
The Ark is put to shame on Ararat.
Not just Noah's ship,
but that covenant of Moses.
See how he's back in this poem
as if a child's boomerang?
Ohm, says the Sensei
from beneath the baobab.

Job's only job was to not grumble.
He couldn't even do *that* right—
when the boils
found their mark. And his daughters
are back from the dead?
Even Lazarus is a skeptic
of that supposed miracle.
He obviously must have died
a second time.
Worse than all the rest of us who
pass away but once.

The black cat is the luckiest one alive.
Watch her,
under the ladder beside the jagged, broken
glass. Double the *points* if it's a mirror.
Subtract
if she coifs her hair. I've never rolled a seven
all my life. And the dice were even loaded.

Scars are but the sum of all our beauty.
The boy
who survived the fire
is the most ravishing of us all.
Just murmur that you love him
into what's left of his knobby ear.

I CAN'T HEAR YOU!

In the End there was a whisper,
and the whisper
was with the God
and the whisper *was* God.

With no one who could listen,
He skimmed *Deimos* over the gulf

like a stone from a fingerless hand.
He saw that it was good.
Somehow we believed it.

“Rusty”

Your pages from the printer
are crumpled into balls,
set aflame. You call them stars
and name them: *Antares, Betelgeuse,*
Sirius and *Sol*.

The light-faded poster for *Alien*—
on the wall of your recollection.
In space, no one can hear you scream.
But you know your midnight bellow
caused ETs to cup their ears.

Your palms cradled the sand
when you went to the beach as a girl—
every grain a pinhead in the sky.
Whenever the dark arose,
you hoped your father was too
drunk to call for you, poor
ginger-haired child
with a welling in both orbs.
You never should have *opened*
the bedroom door. No matter
how passive the knock.

Who else was there to blame?

You titled your tetralogy
after *mother*, who kept
her tongue in a sieve
and uttered nothing.
Not even the proverbial

*we never-ever talk
about such things.*

The next morning, you thought of
what remained upon the shore:
a castle, peopled with the
butts of cigarettes,
ones he'd lazily tossed aside,

as you built
and you built
and you built while hoping
your ass wasn't showing in the sun.

Rituals

Before I start my poem
I need a potent cup of coffee—
colossal extra-grande.
But there's nothing
poetic in that. Any editor
worth their cream will strike
this set-up strophe as chaff.

I could picture my
ceramic *cup*
coming together—the clay
becoming rebellious
with every spin—refusing to take
the humungous form
its master has intended,

complaining the *space*
within the handle
is much too much too big—
unless Kong
is chugging a medium
roast to down his hundred
bananas. Ditto for its lip.

There's a reason
that the clay is used
in scripture's metaphor:

yielding to its maker,
giving up its form
to humbly *obey*
its creator/god,
knowing shape exists
to serve
the hands of shaper.

And please don't get me
started with envisioning
every *bean*—
hand-picked by Juan
Valdez. I saw him
in commercials
during the years I was
a child, with a sombrero
and a poncho
and a mule,

having no idea
that someday I'd
be addicted, unable
to scrawl a word
unless their presence, by
my side;

that this patron
saint of the groggy
was never *bona*
fide, just an actor
akin to Santa
in a suburban shopping
mall, and this is hardly
the place to say

I could have never
come up with *this*—
were it not for
the morning joe
you bring me daily,

so tenderly
to my desk, a kiss
upon my forehead,

the *steam*
ascending on through
the open window,
that the sky
will be the limit
for us both.

The Brush

You lament the amount
of hair that's on your
brush, say it's more
than what is left
upon your head.

More grey than chestnut
brown. More teeth
on your fine-tooth
comb

than inside your gaping
mouth.

That even the eyes
of potatoes
see better than yours.

You can only
eat them mashed,
using too much
salt and heifer's milk,
drinking more
than you did as a babe.

I test its temperature
on my wrist—
never too hot or too cold.

You say your mother
did the very same
thing, refusing to
elucidate
whether you or she
wore diapers at the time,
that horrible sign

the too young
and too old
are *prisoners*—within this
St. Vitus' dance,

like the one
in the high school gym,
pinned against its
wall

like an aster
before the pluck,

aiming to keep
your petals to yourself,
the seeds from the
wind
that scatters them
abroad, into soil
that is bound
to meet *itself*,

as a circle pre-
ordains,
where everything's
the middle and the
end, beginnings
like the sorrow
of Barber's
Adagio,

the one the DJ
chose to play
before he went outside
to smoke,

our feet
abruptly rooted
in the floor,
our tongues
unable to move

within the awkward blush
of youth, when we think
that we've escaped our
impuissance,

thought ourselves immune
to every torment
yet to come.

Old Glory

A patriot
has the duty
to salute. Stand at every
anthem. Rifle
at the ready.

Now begin to count the
stripes & stars
stitched into your lapel.
Say the bars are a lucky
13—a paeon of
ups and downs,
an elevator
that brings you closer
to a floor that's never there,
on every blue-moon
Friday of the year.

Know *one* is indeed
the loneliest number
of all, locked inside a sun,
that everyone around it
looks the same—

there, in a hunter
riding shotgun
in Dakota—North
and South;

and here, on the ice
in Minnesota,
the fish of 10,000
lakes (yes-yes, off by
eighteen-forty-
two).

See, what's excessive
doesn't rate its own
existence, rounded *off*
like sands &
grains, with nowhere
that can hold them,

that if a galaxy
blinks & goes,
you'd have no
idea at all
that it was there.

In Mercy, Alabama,
Quinton Mills
was struck from behind
by a truck.
There was one-less
that was listed
on the U-Haul sign next day,

the village *population*
stuck on six-hundred
ninety-three,

without a painter
or a paint-
brush to be
found,

none to sew the
sadness
on the mortician's
callous face.

Charades

I mime a tender
cradling with my arms.
You counter
with a backward
slap to the air.
I stoop to tie
my shoe.
You fling yours
to the wall.

I tap my shoulder
with a flutter
of my hand.
Like *encouragement*
would. Like any
father should.
You grimace
like your tongue's
just tasted Kids
from the Sour Patch—
or evading in vain
the press of lips
on lips.

On the day of
your father's funeral,
one of us
has to mourn,
roll from our side
at the dawn,
prop ourselves up
with a pillow,

feign that we're
ready
to step out
on the stage,
from behind the
shower's curtain,

as clouds
relinquish their grief,
globules
by the billions,

the rapping
of their water
on our roof,

like applause
from the freshly dead
who know they're not.

Sturnidae

Come, and trip it as ye go
On the light fantastick toe

—John Milton, from *L'Allegro*

Surrounded by their
chatter, we note we haven't
seen the starlings
after dusk,
a whirl of black-
on-black,
how pointless that would
be, while Sol is on its errand
to warmly soak
the other *side*—

the Philippines,
Australia,
the islands of the rising
red.

They sleep *inverted*
with their eyes
toward the ground, you've heard.
Like the bats. *Have you ever seen*
the bats?

My phobia
won't allow it, I respond,
something about the
flight of ghastly rats

but by then you're back
to talk about the star-
lings:

They trip the light fantastic
while it's day,
trying for a million years
to get our
attention.

As to *what* they might be
saying you simply shrug.

We'd be indifferent
to their warnings, think we
know it all
when it comes to love.

Sunlings,
you conclude,
that's what we should've
called them, so we'll
heed at last the
nightly murmuration
of the stars—

so slow to our perception
but at the sprint
and dash of light,

their wings of silver-
white, every feather
standing
on its head,

revealing the *world*
is upside-down
and only the birds
have twirled to see it.

The Crash, or Another Shitty Lesson in Astrophysics

Atoms free their
energy by collision.
The release
of *luminance*.
Everything there is

must owe its
blessed existence
to the crunch of
calamity.
Through the failure to
evade.

Mountains rise
from a pair of plates—
collided. A buckle
and a fold
like a smash along
the freeway. The girl
upon a gurney
won the triathlon
one year hence,

citing
her strength of will,
upon told
she'd never walk.

People expire *daily*
from the collision of
their coupes. Look at the
endless faces
that arise
to take their place.
You surely would have

chanced a different man,
had *Lucius* for a son.
Look upon the vista
of your dream—watch them
clutch their Griffins,
every laud
& poet laureate
in the land. I gave you nothing
of the kind. This verse
will be forgotten
in an hour.

We fell in love
the day that we
collided, on the carnival's
bumper cars. Eyes
that slammed in seconds,
fusing in the midst

of the utterly
absurd,
another random
burst

from a pair of
clumsy things,

appearing to be
blind despite the light,
unwilling to spy the
road where we are going.

**for the doctor who took me out
of my mother's womb**

Earthworms have no eyes,
but they do have light receptors
and can tell when they are
in the dark or in the light.

—*journeynorth.org*

A baby
never chooses
to be born.
That much
I can tell you.

If presented
with the option,
I would have
turned and
climbed the birth
canal—

if I'd seen
the copious
suffering
that awaited,

spreading
wide its talons,

seducing
like a salesman,
ever-willing
to beguile,

with the lie
of love and
life,

how much sorrow
you can take,

that you'll bounce
back like the
balls
in every
lottery there is,

the one
you'll never win,

like a worm
that arises
to the surface,

failing to
burrow back
into the earth,
be wise enough
to leave the world
behind,

leave the birds
behind,

proof
they weren't
sightless
to begin with,
that eyes
are not the only
way to see,

that they've learned
at last to snub
the falling rain,
this somber
convocant,

its call
in April
air,
its hoodwink
that it's here
to bathe them
clean.





The author of three-dozen books of poetry including *Clocking the Equus: Poems Selected and New*, long-time Londoner Andreas Gripp now lives Leamington, Ontario, with his wife, Carrie.



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